

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9510

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY

AMCONSUL ASMARA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3182

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS

SUBJ: CISCO II

REF: STATE 086635

1. LOCAL AP OFFICE HAS LITTLE INFORMATION OTHER THAN THAT CONTAINED IN STORY. IT IS THEIR UNDERSTANDING THAT MOHAMMAD ALI, WHO USED TO BE SIDEKICK OF OSMAN SABBE, HAS TAKEN OVER AND SABBE HAS LOST OUT COMPLETELY AS RESULT OF ORGANIZATIONAL DISPUTES DESCRIBED IN STORY. MOHAMMAD ALI HINTED THAT OVERALL DISPUTE BASED ON MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN PROBLEMS (BOTH SABBE AND ALI ARE MUSLIMS.)

2. EMBOFF ASKED AMCIT AP REPORTER IF ANYONE HAD POINTED OUT TO ALI USC'S NO-BLACKMAIL POSITION. REPORTER SAID HE THOUGHT NOT IN THIS SPECIFIC CONTACT. HOWEVER, HE SAID, IN PREVIOUS CONTACTS WITH ELF REPRESENTATIVES HE HAS FORMED IMPRESSION THEY PROBABLY DO NOT BELIEVE THIS POLICY IS UNIFORMLY APPLIED. REPORTER CITES FACT THAT PFLP PERSONNEL IN BEIRUT TOLD HIM PERSONALLY THAT THEY RECEIVED LARGE QUANTITY OF ARMS FOR RELEASE GALLAGHER-DYKES. AP REPORTER SAID THAT ALTHOUGH HE PERSONALLY

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DOES NOT BELIEVE THIS, PEOPLE IN PFLP MILIEU PROBABLY DO, AND

THIS SORT OF TALK PRESUMABLY REACHES ELP REPRESENTATIVES IN MIDEAST.

3. IN DISCUSSION IT EVOLVED THAT AP REPORTER RECOGNIZED IN CROWD COVERING AMB. BROWN YESTERDAY A LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHER HE BELIEVES HAS JUST RETURNED FROM SEVERAL WEEKS IN ERITREA. ON BEHALF OF AP HE PLANS TO SEEK OUT PHOTOGRAPHER FOR STORY OR PHOTOS. IF ANYTHING OF INTEREST CONCERNING FOREIGN CAPTIVES DEVELOPS, HE SAID HE WILL PASS IT ON TO EMB.

4. IN CASE AP NEW YORK DID NOT PRINT ENTIRE STORY, FOLLOWING IS VERSION FILED FROM BEIRUT NIGHT APRIL 8, PLUS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY AP BEIRUT IN RESPONSE TO QUERY FROM AP NEW YORK OFFICE.

5. BEGIN TEXT: BEIRUT (AP) ERITREAN REBELS HAVE THREATENED AGAIN TO KILL TWO CAPTIVE AMERICAN COMMUNICATIONS TECHNICIANS AND A BRITISH DIPLOMAT UNLESS RANSOMS ARE PAID BY THEIR GOVERNMENTS, AN ERITREAN SPOKESMAN SAID HERE THURSDAY.

THE AMERICANS ARE JIM HARRELL OF MILWAUKEE, WISC., AND STEVE CAMPBELL OF SAN LEANDRO, CALIFORNIA, BOTH TECHNICIANS AT KAGNEW COMMUNICATIONS BASE NEAR ASMARA, CAPITAL OF NORTHER ERITREA.

HARRELL AND CAMPBELL WERE ABDUCTED BY ERITREAN REBELS FROM KAGNEW LAST JULY 14. THEY HAVE BEEN HELD IN AN ERITREAN POPULAR FORCES BASE SINCE THEN. THE THIRD CAPTIVE, BASIL TAYLOR, HONORARY BRITISH CONSUL IN ASMARA, WAS KIDNAPPED IN DECEMBER.

MOHAMMAD ALI, ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT SPOKESMAN, SAID THE ELF HAS DEMANDED \$3,000,000 FOR THE RELEASE OF THE TWO AMERICANS AND ANOTHER UNSPECIFIED AMOUNT FOR THE RELEASE OF TAYLOR.

IN MESSAGES RELAYED TO THE US AND BRITISH EMBASSIES IN KHARTOUM, SUDAN, THROUGH THE ELF KHARTOUM OFFICE EARLIER THIS MONTH, THE FRONT THREATENED TO KILL THE THREE UNLESS SOME MONEY WAS DELIVERED BY THE END OF APRIL, HE SAID

"THE THREE HAVE EXACTLY 21 DAYS LEFT," HE ADDED. THE THREAT
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REFLECTS A RIFT BETWEEN THE CIVILIAN AND MILITARY COMMANDS OF THE ELF OVER THE FATE OF FOREIGN CAPTIVES. THE REBELS THREATENED LAST SEPT 15 TO KILL HARRELL AND CAMPBELL WITH A NUMBER OF OTHER CAPTIVES UNLESS THE US STOPPED MILITARY AID TO ETHIOPIA, FROM WHICH THE REBELS ARE SEEKING INDEPENDENCE. THEY ALSO DEMANDED A RANSOM OF \$5 MILLION. THE CIVILIAN COMMAND PRESSURED THE MILITARY LEADERS TO DROP THE THREAT AND INSURE THE RELEASE OF THE CAPTIVES WITHOUT ANY CONDITIONS. PRESSURE ALSO CAME FROM

SAUDI ARABIA, IRAQ AND SYRIA. ALI ANNOUNCED LAST JAN. 26 THAT ALL CAPTIVES WOULD BE RELEASED SOON, UNCONDITIONALLY. "THIS COULD TAKE A FEW WEEKS BUT THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT THE DECISION HAS BEEN TAKEN," HE SAID. HE HAD NO CLEAR EXPLANATION FOR THE CHANGE BUT REFERRED TO "ORGANIZATIONAL DISPUTES" THAT EMERGED AT AN ELF MEETING IN KHARTOUM IN MARCH.

HE SAID THE ELF'S FOREIGN MISSION, THE FRONT'S INFORMATION AND AID-SEEKING ARM, RELINQUISHED AT THE KHARTOUM MEETING ITS ROLE AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE POPULAR LIBERATION FORCES. THE ERITREAN POPULAR FRONT IS ONE OF THE ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT'S TWO FIGHTING GROUPS. IT IS THE GROUP HOLDING HARRELL AND CAMPBELL.
(END TEXT)

6. AP BEIRUT THEN TOLD BY AP NEW YORK THAT RONALD MISHALKE HAD BEEN AMONG THE THREE AMERICAN CAPTIVES AND ASKED WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM. MOHAMMAD ALI SAID THAT HARRELL AND CAMPBELL WERE THE ONLY TWO AMERICANS WITH HIS GROUP. THE OTHER CAPTIVES ARE WITH THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL, WHICH IS THE OTHER GROUP UNDER THE ELF UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION. MOHAMMAD ALI SAID THE FOREIGN REPRESENTATIVE BODY OSMAN SABBE WAS RUNNING HAS LOST ITS CLAIM TO SPEAK FOR ONE OF THE TWO GROUPS, THE ONE HOLDING HARRELL, CAMPBELL AND TAYLOR, AND MOHAMMAD ALI IS TAKING OVER AS SPOKESMAN FOR THEM.
BROWN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: KIDNAPPING, EXTORTION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 APR 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BEIRUT03182
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760136-0699
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760475/aaaacmdw.tel
Line Count: 140
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 76 STATE 86635
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 JUN 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <06 OCT 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CISCO II
TAGS: PINS, LE, (ALI, MOHAMMED)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006